

INSPIRATION IN COMMON LIFE

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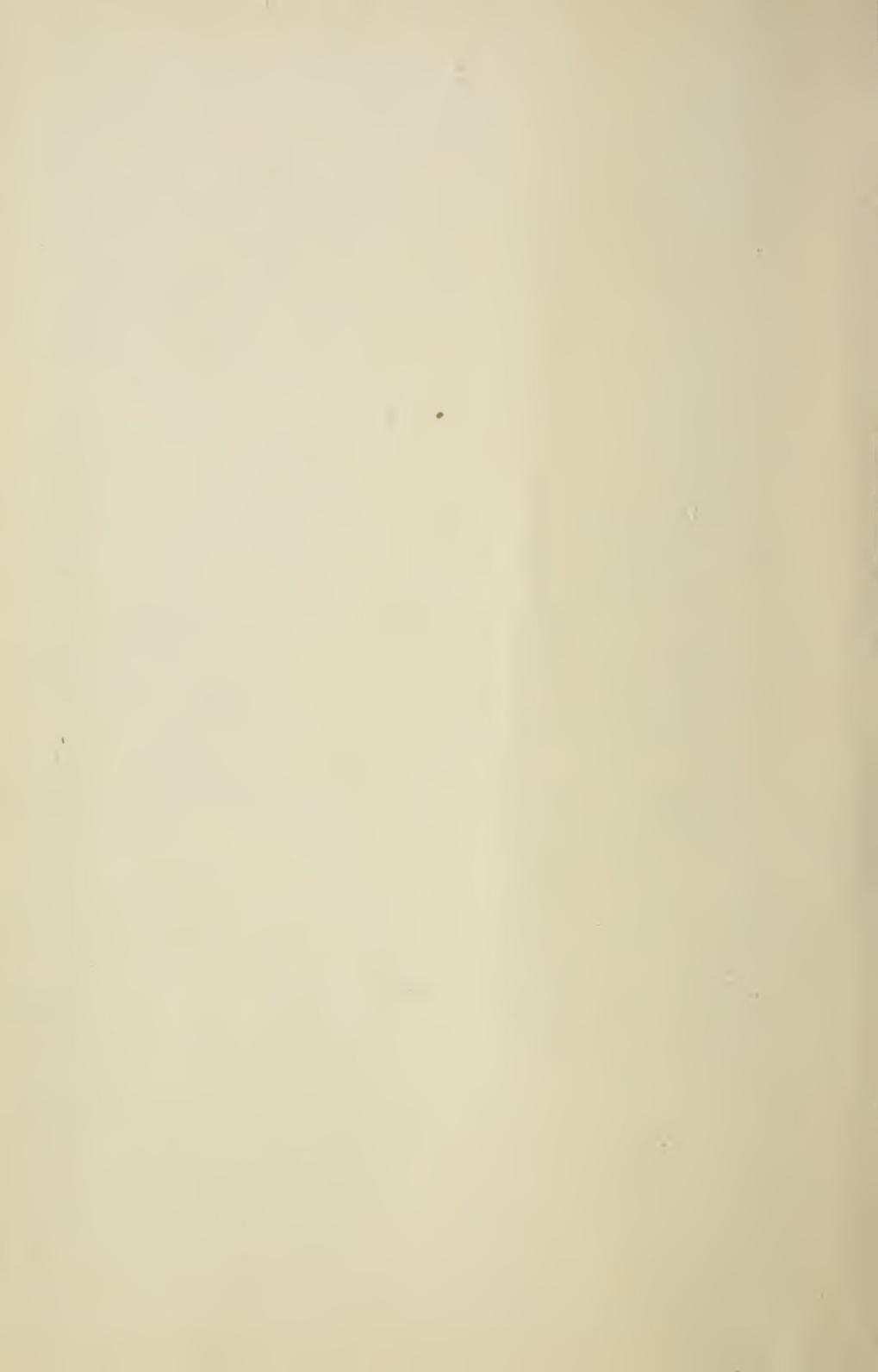


W.L.WATKINSON



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INSPIRATION IN COMMON LIFE

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INSPIRATION IN COMMON LIFE.

"Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? . . . For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him."—Isa. xxviii. 24—26.

THE great doctrine of this fine passage is unfortunately only imperfectly realised by us. The fact that God dwells in the common people, instructing and teaching them to discretion, is a precious truth which it is of the first consequence that we should understand and appreciate. The inspiration of the Bible excites fierce and endless controversy, whilst we well-nigh forget the inspiration of the living epistle of the street.

I. God guides the lowliest of His children in all the affairs of their worldly life. Few will read the text without

a measure of surprise: there is something so absolutely startling in this abrupt contact of the Almighty with the ploughman. Why, then, are we thus surprised?

1. It arises from the fact that we distinguish between intellectual and vulgar life, excluding God from the latter. No difficulty is felt in acknowledging the inspiration of the artist. We read that Bezaleel was "filled with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship." This testimony excites no surprise. We accept the inspiration of the philosopher. That Copernicus by a kind of supernatural flash perceived the celestial order, and that Newton by a similar intuition discerned the master-law in the falling apple, most are willing to allow. We believe, too, in the

inspiration of the poet, at least in the inspiration of a few. When a master-minstrel makes glorious music, it is easy to believe in the divine in-breathing. But it is an altogether different matter to recognise the inspiration of the ploughman. What mystical illumination can the peasantry need in breaking clods, weeding crops, binding sheaves, or tending sheep? What divine teaching is called for in saw-mills, ship-yards, factories, forges, tanneries, potteries, or in the humble tenement of the labourer?

Yet this passage may remind us that the distinction drawn in human life and duty between the intellectual and vulgar is unauthenticated. God is not confined to picture-galleries, museums, observatories, and libraries; nor is inspiration limited to scholars, scientists, and artists: He is equally present and operative in the miscalled vulgar sphere, giving the lowliest toiler insight into whatever relates to his calling and service. There is no vulgar world,

although, unfortunately, there are many vulgar people. The whole range of human duty is one undivided kingdom, the working out of one divine purpose, the various appointments of one glorious Taskmaster ; thus all callings are noble, all faithful workers honourable, and the dust of the world is the dust of gold.

2. We are surprised at the contact of the Almighty with ploughmen because of our habit of distinguishing between influential and insignificant life, excluding God from the latter. We are not astonished to learn that God inspires princes, as when He granted supernatural enlightenment to Solomon. The ploughman, however, seems quite insignificant, and his affairs petty. But *is* he insignificant ? In truth he is one of the essential actors of the world ; were his task neglected or badly wrought things would go sadly with us all. We might dispense with a king, not with the ploughman. Therefore God makes him a rough geologist, chemist, meteorologist, and astronomer ; one with an

understanding of soils, seeds, and seasons ; so that the hearts of men may be filled with food and gladness. Every true member of the great hierarchy of workers is important: none may say who amongst us is the most important, who the least. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.” *Are* the ploughman’s affairs trivial ? Whilst listening to a wrangle in the House of Commons a nobleman is reported to have whispered to his son : “ See with how little wisdom a nation is governed.” On the other hand, what thought, judgment, and resourcefulness are demanded in the successful management of a modest household ! The parade of parliaments is lacking there, but all problems of national government are settled in domestic councils ; the pageantry of courts is absent, but all the gladness and glory of life are

proved by the fireside ; the pomps of woe are unknown, but all the tragedy of life is there. Great statesmen build noble empire only as they find the gold and ivory, the cedar and scarlet, in the cottages of the people. The hind makes and saves empire. “ If we cast a glance over the pages of history, we may note that the monarch, the statesman, the financier, and the philosopher continually contrive to bring the world to the verge of ruin, and that it is only saved from utter destruction by the peasant’s blood, by his hard-won earnings, and his patient toil. Is not that the story of the nations in a few words ? ”* No life is insignificant. Every man is of immense importance to himself ; the various members of a household are of profound interest to one another ; and each obscure home exerts a real influence upon the welfare of nations and serves to shape the destiny of the race. The superficial distinctions of status and culture about which we make so much

* “ Rustic Art,” by Henry Naegely.

ado have no existence for God ; He knows the pure humanity only, and with sovereign impartiality breathes in oaten pipe and jewelled lute.

3. We are surprised at this contact of God with ploughmen because of our habit of distinguishing between sacred life and secular, whilst excluding God from the latter. We naturally concede the inspiration of prophet and priest. They hold commerce directly with the upper universe ; they hear the divine voice ; they are the ministers and messengers of God's spiritual kingdom and purpose ; there is therefore nothing to marvel at in the fact that He anoints and instructs them, makes their face to shine, and touches their lips with hallowed fire. But the ploughman breaking clods and sowing fitches occupies a very different position, apparently belonging to a distinctly inferior sphere—the realm of the material, mechanical, and secular. Yet in the view of our text the ploughman's realm and that of the prophet are identical. Remember that God lives and moves

in the worldly circle as certainly as He does in the ecclesiastical, in the shop as in the sanctuary, in the ploughman as in the priest. Far from narrowing the sphere of the spiritual, let us widen it until it comprehends all that concerns human life and character. To see the supernatural in the natural, the poetic in the rude, is the most clamant need of our times, and the true line of human progress. As Ferdinand Brunetière says: "There are no commonplaces, there are only lazy minds." We owe as much, perhaps more, to poets like Burns, and painters like Millet, who brought home to us the pathos, loveliness, and sacredness of lowly folk and their simple lot, than we do to bards like Homer, and artists like Raphael, who painted the grandeurs of heroic spheres. He who revealed to us in the *Angelus* the lurking mystery and glory of the peasant disclosed more than he who showed an angel standing in the sun. Let us eagerly and lovingly recognise the mysticism and holiness of the

commonplace and universal. We hallow the Lord's Day. Does that imply that the other six days of the week are not holy, or less holy? Surely not; for the seventh day is the symbol of the holiness of every day, of the sanctity of all duration. We uncover in the sanctuary. Does that signify that other places are unconsecrated? Nay; the sanctuary is the symbol of the sanctity of all space. The inspiration of the Scriptures is a doctrine dear to the devout. Does that suggest that the in-breathing of the Spirit is the monopoly of prophet and apostle? Much rather does it imply that the Bible is the symbol of the fact that true men and women everywhere are taught of God. "Down with everything that is up," is in some quarters a popular cry. Degrade the holy day, the holy place, the holy book. Let us follow another programme. Do not secularise the Lord's Day, consecrate the other days; do not depreciate the sanctuary, hallow the other places; do not fretfully pick holes in the doctrine of Biblical authority and

inspiration, see to it that all the Lord's people are prophets.

We sometimes look up into the blue sky and think how far the earth lies below it—the tender, pure, luminous firmament seems mysteriously remote. But this is a mere optical illusion: the blue sky is not far off; it is blue down here as it is up there; we live in the blue sky, sit in heavenly places, dwell amid the stars. Thus human life is apt to appear common and debased, far removed from the celestial and divine. But this also is an illusion: things close to our hands and feet are divine; all is sacred, sabbatic, and sacramental; God broods over all, and all is for eternity.

Our everyday work must be done in a higher spirit. Let each worker know that he is not a "hand," but a soul; that he is a minister of God; and that every office must be filled, every relation sustained, and every duty wrought in the spirit of prayer and consecration. Think of the temper in which the old builders reared and adorned the cathedrals.

The devout craftsmen wrought as in the presence of God, and their creations, saturated with great thought and fine feeling, are the wonder and pride of successive generations. Every ploughman, labourer, artificer, shop-keeper, manufacturer, and merchant should pursue his task with similar intelligence, conscience, and aspiration ; in the self-same spirit of enthusiasm, reverence, and love. And if we do this, we may justly claim the divine guidance and strengthening in all the affairs of our worldly life. The churl is not too mean ; nothing is too minute for Heaven's notice and blessing. "He despiseth not any." Bring your faith to bear upon every domestic perplexity, financial care, social duty, and worldly solicitude. Our religion may and ought to pervade the whole range of thought and action. Wait for the divine prompting, follow the divine leading, realise the divine grace and benediction in every situation, duty, and concern of life, however humble may seem your lot and trivial your

care. In the house, the field, the shop, and the exchange, plan and act in the light and power of the Divine Spirit, and the most obscure station and menial task shall yield satisfying joy, and work out splendid consequences in character and destiny.

II. *God guides the lowliest of His children in all the affairs of their inner life.* The lowliest of men possess a great spiritual nature. We spoke of the painter and the ploughman: the painter is in the ploughman; he does not always get out as he did in Jean François Millet, but he is there even when he produces no masterpieces, for often the rude rustic gazes upon the glory of sky and landscape with joy unspeakable. We spoke of the poet and the ploughman: the poet is in the ploughman; he does not often get out as he did in Robert Burns, but he is there even when mute, for “God has made many poets, and given utterance only to a few.” We spoke of the prophet and the ploughman: the prophet

is in the ploughman; he rarely gets out as he did in Amos, but he is there even when his pained heart, pregnant with celestial fire, finds no expression. Let us, however, drop all metaphor, and frankly affirm the spirituality and unfathomableness of shepherd and swineherd as well as the essential greatness of sovereign and seer. Misguided thinkers labour to establish a radical distinction between men, compared with which all merely social and political distinctions are trifling. They assume that we belong to two entirely different orders: there is first a small aristocracy of the soul, and then comes the vulgar democratic mass which is clay, only clay. Revelation knows nothing of such a distinction. In the Old Testament God elects His prophets from the tillers of the field; in the New Testament Christ chooses His apostles from the fishers of the sea. We are "all of one"—of one stock; alike spiritual, infinite, immortal: there is no difference in our quality, as there is none in our guilt. Christianity

unwaveringly proclaims the essential greatness of the lowliest races, classes, and individuals.

All have heard of the epitaph inscribed on the frail memorial of a peasant in the country churchyard : "Only a clod." Whether dictated in a pathetic or cynical temper, that epitaph is really very grand. What wonderful things are latent in a clod ! All possibilities of form, colour, music, light, fragrance, and fruitfulness, are there. Exquisite shapes, ravishing hues, ears of gold, purple clusters, bread to strengthen man's heart, and oil to make his face to shine, dropping honey, burning roses, pure lilies, and a thousand other miracles of grace and glory spring out of the dust. "Only a clod." "So you think you know what a clod is, do you ?" is the arch query of Schopenhauer. Indeed, we do not. The mystery, splendour, and potency of the world are unfolded in the clod of the valley on which we set our foot. Thus is it with the ploughman himself. We dismiss him as a

clown, and his short and simple annals are soon forgotten, but we little reck the grandeur wrapped up in that rude shape. "Only a clod." It will amaze us on the morning of the Resurrection to see what God brings out of that clod when this corruptible puts on incorruption and this mortal puts on immortality. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

And God is ever ready to guide and save His greatly gifted children whose potential splendour is for the present so thickly disguised. He causes them to apprehend the deepest truths of revelation and spiritual life. Where great scholars stumble, simple souls grasp the things freely given us of God. Our Lord burst forth as in glad surprise: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." As Emerson somewhere says: "The best light that comes to any man is in those fitful flashes which visit the

firmament of the mind"; and this light of life is vouchsafed to all honest souls. God grants the illumination of pure truth to the most illiterate; and whilst they are profoundly ignorant of a thousand intellectual themes, they are filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The most cultured scholars, as well as the most profound divines and philosophers, are often astonished at the marvellous spiritual insight of the man in the street. The ploughboy, artisan, fisher, and dustman, lacking the first elements of education, come to the knowledge of the true God and eternal life. And through years of moral development the Spirit of God abides with them, unveiling to them grand ideals, inspiring them with the wisdom that is from above, causing them to grasp the significance of sorrow and suffering, endowing them with heroic fortitude, and kindling within them mighty hopes. They get nothing from the book-shelf, everything from the sky. "The Lord preserveth

the simple." Clever people take care of themselves, and we may often see with what disastrous consequences ; but the meek and poor He lovingly guides in paths of truth and peace.

We all need the personal, direct, and continuous leading of God, and nothing can become a substitute for this. If in this country we wish to take a journey, there is a plain path before us and a finger-post at every turn of the road ; but when the Indian sets forth to cross trackless forest and pathless prairie, he has a different task : he can find his way only by consulting a variety of delicate signs—the position of the sun, the rise and set of stars, the trend of the trees, the flight of birds, the compass-flower in the grass ; and only as the traveller is acute enough to observe and interpret these signs does he walk safely. Our path through this world is like that of the Indian. In worldly affairs no philosopher, in spiritual affairs no theologian, can make our path plain. You cannot make life topographical. According to

a French writer, "The poet's compass is his intuition"; it is certainly the compass of the saint. Every career is full of original situations and perplexing questions; none ever passed this way before, and all must listen for God's whisper in their heart. "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Here is the secret. Keep your eye on God's eye; cherish a sincere, sensitive, responsive soul; and He shall preserve you from every false way. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

II.

HIGH LATITUDES.

"God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."—EPH. ii. 6.

THE apostle here reminds us that the true believer is identified with Christ in His resurrection and enthronement at God's right hand ; as Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to the heavenly regions, there to reign in authority and blessedness, so His disciples are exalted in Him to share His power and joy. The text does not speak of a future exaltation, but of one that has already taken place; it does not refer to a rare mood or passing ecstasy, but to a permanent loftiness of soul : it teaches that in the power of the Spirit the Christian habitually realises an ideal life in Christ Jesus. Let no one in the name of the

practical despise the mysticism of the text. What would become of literature if a transcendentalist like Emerson or Maeterlinck did not appear every now and then? What would become of art if an idealist like Watts did not occasionally excite our wonder? What would become of ethics if it were not for the intermittent visitation of poets, mystics, and saints fluttering the utilitarians? What we now propose is to insist on the splendid gain of realising to the full this heavenly life, the vital advantage of living with a vivid consciousness of God, in the rich experience of His grace, in the clear, commanding hope of immortality. Live on the highest level, see to it that you are actuated by and infolded in the heavenly. The spiritual is the salt of life, and without it everything decays that makes us men. By centring our thought on God, by alluring us with the vision of our Lord's unearthly beauty, by unsealing fountains of inspiration in prayer and worship, by lifting us nigh to heaven's

gate, the New Testament exalts experience and character to rare altitudes of perfection and blessedness. Life is at its best in high latitudes of thought and emotion, at its best of all on those table-lands of which God Himself is sun and moon.

1. In heavenly places in Christ Jesus *we are most exempt from error*. Men of action feel the need of a certain periodic intellectual detachment from the sphere of their activity ; they realise that they must withdraw themselves from immediate contact with their vocation, must survey their work from a distance, and stand outside and above their worldly calling, if they are to comprehend the situation and do it justice. Statesmen absorbed in public affairs take refuge in history, philosophy, theology, fiction, and poetry—Bright read Milton, Gladstone studied Homer, Salisbury cultivated science, and Balfour delights in philosophy. To direct parochial politics wisely the statesman must at intervals rise above the local and the

current, he must muse in high places, look far and wide, and correct his thought and judgment by reference to universal and abiding truths. The same is true of all men: if they are to judge justly and live successfully, they must ponder life from high places, see it from afar in the light of God's character and government, of Christ's spirit and mission, in the light of eternity, for only then do they see it truly. Recently a newspaper writer was protesting against people in public assemblies obstructing their neighbours' vision by wearing hats and ornaments of inordinate dimensions, and in emphasising his protest he enlarged on "the malignance of the law of perspective," the blinding power of a trifling object near the eye, making invisible vast objects at a little distance—in the theatre a tiny flower eclipsing the stage, in church the frond of a feather hiding the pulpit and the preacher. But where is "the malignance of the law of perspective" most tremendously illustrated? Surely in the strange power of worldly

trifles to render invisible the magnitudes of eternity. A rose-bud of pleasure close to the eye shuts out the abiding universe of glory and joy; a speck of gold-leaf tragically blinds one to heaven and hell; a morsel of pottage makes men oblivious of their splendid birthright; and the frond of pride's feather not only renders the pulpit invisible, but too often clouds the vast truths of which the pulpit is the symbol. "The malignance of the law of perspective" is seen at its worst when the sensual obscures the spiritual, the material the moral, and the temporal the eternal. How shall we escape this malignance? Get into the high mountain, scale the sky and stand by the angel in the sun, nay, weigh and measure the earth as you sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, for it is only when from the heights of eternity we estimate the seen and temporal that we gauge their true worth, realise their meaning, and know how they may best serve our everlasting interest.

Until quite recently astronomical

observatories were built in or near large cities, little attention being paid to astronomical considerations; but now when such an observatory is founded an effort is made to get the inestimable advantage of a good climate for the purposes of celestial observation. The Lick Observatory, on Mount Hamilton, California, stands more than four thousand feet high; there is no question about the excellence of the climate—no fog, dust, smoke, or atmospheric tremors blur the images in the telescope; all is clear and calm, “God’s own climate.” In such happily situated places the exact truth concerning the facts and laws of the firmament is ascertained and published for the benefit of mankind. When men live in the big city, occupied early and late with its affairs and distractions, does it not obscure their thought, warp their judgment, depress their ideals? Think of living the year round in the commercial world, with all its injustices; in the political world, with all its dishonesties; in the

social world, with all its unrealities ; in the religious world, with all its bigotries ! The intellect will lose its lucidity, the conscience its discriminativeness, the heart its charity, and all life its sincerity and freshness. If we mind only earthly things, we must necessarily become the victims of manifold misconceptions, prejudices, superstitions, and illusions. What, then, shall we do that we may retain the sanity of our nature, the truth of vision, and that our verdicts may be reliable ? Mount into "God's own climate," beyond fog, dust, and cloud, beyond the causes and occasions of disturbance and aberration ; talk with

"The great old saints of other days,
Who once received on Horeb's height
The eternal laws of truth and right,
Or caught the still small whisper, higher
Than storm, than earthquake, or than fire" ;

see life in God's light ; test all by the spirit and teaching of the Christ : so shall you "be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

2. In heavenly places in Christ Jesus *we are safest from contamination and peril.* Those who live on high levels of principle, sentiment, and conduct are entirely exempt from many forms of temptation and danger. Gambling, pocket-picking, and tippling to some are dreadful temptations; whilst to men of another order, living on a higher level of knowledge, strength and action, such temptations do not exist. Already to many of us certain forms of moral besetment are as though they were not; if we mount to higher ranges, other possibilities of evil of which we are conscious will similarly cease; whilst on the highest summits of all we best deal with whatever assaults of the soul are still inevitable. After traversing a certain distance the projectile force of a bullet is spent, and at this culminating-point the hand of an infant might catch it with impunity. An eagle soars so high that the ball reaches him harmlessly—it does not injure a feather of his wing, which he will flap as in derision: whilst sportsmen

in Australia find their largest shot of no avail in bringing down the cockatoos which generally perch on the highest branches of the giant trees; the shot rattle on their brilliant feathers with less force than a shower of hailstones—in the tree-tops, or at the “dead point” of the missile, the birds rest in perfect security. So the saints who claim the fulness of their privilege, living “high in salvation and the climes of bliss,” are above and beyond the “dead point” of fiery arrows which at shorter ranges wound and destroy. On low levels we are exposed to all temptations, and fight them at extreme disadvantage; rising to a higher sphere of spiritual imagination, heavenly fellowship, and moral quality, many forms of temptation and peril are entirely transcended.

Yet, live high as we may, we cannot get beyond the range of temptation. It pursued our Master, who dwelt only in heavenly places; and if in moral elevation His disciples gain the morning star,

evil will attempt their senses and understanding, their imagination and affections. The whole world believed that nothing contaminating would be found at the summit of Mont Blanc : who could suspect that vicious germs would infest its crystal, agents of infection be detected in its virgin snow, or that elements of disease and death would poison the streams of its immaculate springs ? But the relentless bacteriologist has destroyed this illusion, for his pitiless microscope has revealed microbes even in the very sanctuary of purity and beauty. The wind, sweeping the woods and cities of the valleys, carries the plague germs right up into the sky, and defiles the chaste heights of transparent glass and stainless snow. It is much like this in human life and in the history of the soul. However elevated our thought, feeling and purpose, temptation will still surprise and threaten ; there is no snow-line to forbid the infernal microbes. They penetrate the temple, invade the pulpit, profane the chamber of secret

prayer; and when scientists warn us against microbes in the communion-cup, we may remember also the spiritual peril that lurks in our holiest things. Attaining the highest peaks of experience and character—the purest thought, the finest feeling, the saintliest living—we are still haunted by the suggestions and seductions of evil: in the most aerial triumph of the soul we are still conscious of the law of gravitation and all the sad possibilities of the lower world. Turning to the sixth chapter and twelfth verse of this epistle we read these extraordinary words: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Infernal powers, wicked spirits, darken the “heavenly places”; a great struggle is waged in these high latitudes, noble souls and princes of the air

“Grappling in the central blue.”

Yet “heavenly places” are the best

places in which to fight the foes of the soul, the choicest coigns of vantage. Bacteriologists console us that the air on the summit of Mont Blanc contains only a small number of germs, the glacier streams are most pure, and the freshly fallen snow does not yield a single microbe. The pestilent creatures reach the heights, but they do not get on well there ; the air does not suit them, the crystal environment attenuates and destroys them : they thrive far better down below in stables, slaughter-houses, piggeries, slums, and drains—there they swarm, riot, and prevail. Let us deal with temptation on high levels, as the Master did ; not appealing to low motives, selfish considerations, and arguments drawn from secular and social sources, but fighting it with spiritual weapons on the grounds of eternity. Fight the good fight under the very eye of God, standing close by His side, arrayed in His armour of light. We are not saved from the evil which assaults, or the ills which threaten

us, by cleverness, prudence, or diplomacy, nor by any utilitarian motives or methods whatever ; we are invincible and victorious in our sense of God, in alliances with the heavenly, in the vision and inspiration of the life everlasting. “ Which God wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come ; and hath put all things under His feet ” (Eph. i. 20-22). God hath highly exalted Him ; and in His mediatorial character and office He sits above every authority, lordship, power, and government—all being subject to Him. If we dwell above in Him, if we be one with Him, if His sovereign power work in and through us, then in every conflict with the world, every bitter wrestling with passion and appetite, in every strange struggle with unknown forces of darkness, the conquest

must be with us. We have lost battles because we have not reckoned with the spirituality and unfathomable-ness of wickedness ; henceforth contend with it in the light and energy and authority of Him who sits at God's right hand in the heavenly places, and lost battles will be converted into triumphs.

3. In heavenly places we *realise fulness of peace and blessedness*. These radiant altitudes mean perfected felicity. Full of reverence and love, of faith and hope, with the soul strengthened and harmonised by the vision of the good and holy God, we prove the peace that this world neither gives nor takes away. On the Continent gruesome crypts are shown paved with gravestones and lined with skulls, and here the monks are supposed to spend choice hours of contemplation and devotion. What a sad travesty ! Jesus Christ never leads His disciples down into subterranean cells, He does not look that way ; He points upward, He leads us through the lights and colours of the sky, He clothes us

with the sun, He puts into the heart the solemn serenity of the stars. The faith of Christ is of the very essence of peace and gladness. “God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” In earlier strata geologists find what may be regarded as rough drafts of the more exquisite creations of later periods ; and in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy we find the first crude sketch of the ideal life ultimately realised in Jesus Christ. “But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven : a land which the Lord thy God careth for : the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” This country was the prototype of that land which John Bunyan painted so gloriously because he lived in it. “The country of Beulah, whose air was very sweet and pleasant. Yea, here the pilgrims heard continually the singing of birds, and saw every day

the flowers appear in the earth. In this country the sun shineth night and day. Here they were within sight of the city they were going to ; also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof ; for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of heaven.” This is the life to which we are called in Christ Jesus ; a life without pride or fear, self-will or murmuring, beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death, out of reach of Giant Despair, and whence we cannot so much as see Doubting Castle. This life is impossible on low levels. Beulah blooms on highest altitudes of entire consecration and absolute surrender to the love and law of God ; and we can solace ourselves with the corn and wine of the favoured land only as we rise above every carnal, compromising thought, motive, and sympathy. On lower levels the rare flowers do not bloom, the birds do not sing, and the angels do not walk. Whymper, the Alpine climber, said of one of his guides that “he was happy

only when upwards of ten thousand feet high"; and no one knows the pure joy of life until he leaves beneath him the eagle's nest and finds the mystic edelweiss of snow-white purity in the blue depths of "God's own climate" of infinite holiness and love.

III.

THE GUILD OF GOD.

"For we are God's fellow-workers."—
1 COR. iii. 9 (R.V.).

IT is a special feature of the Christian revelation that throughout it exhibits God as a Worker. Other systems represent Him as being eternally at rest; He is pictured as an infinite Dreamer; to impute to Him anything like personal action is considered derogatory to His glory. The first article of the Christian creed recognises the divine activity. "I believe in God the Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth;" and having made the glorious world, we believe that He abides in its midst actuating all things according to the purpose of His will. He also rejoices in the habitable parts of the earth, seeking to bring to pass His sublime designs. "My Father

worketh hitherto, and I work," testified the Saviour. The text assigns to us the high honour of being "God's fellow-workers." The Almighty condescends to associate us with Himself in the carrying out of His vast far-reaching plans. Familiarity with this thought must not blind us to its essential grandeur. In a true sense the orbs of heaven, the forces of the earth, creeping things and flying fowl, are messengers and instruments of the Divine Will; but whilst they act involuntarily and unconsciously, we may co-operate with God intelligently, willingly, lovingly. In a sense altogether special it is our privilege to become His "fellow-workers."

1. *Consider the great design and obligation of life.* To what end does God work? What is the sum and goal of the divine purpose and activity? To establish in the human heart and in human society the kingdom of justice and righteousness. The aim of God in the government of the world is not æsthetic, intellectual, or material; He does not

rule to the end of sensuous enjoyment, the accumulation of the riches of civilisation, or the mental aggrandisement of the race, but that the kingdom of earth may reflect the purity, love, and peace of the kingdom in the heavens. He ever strives to bring the individual into harmony with the supreme law, to build the nations into a living and holy temple, to fill all lands with the noble fruits of goodness and joy. By the ministry of sun, moon, and stars ; by His government of kings and peoples ; by the lamp of His word ; by the manifold activities of His Church ; and by the influences of His Holy Spirit, He ever works for the illumination, healing, and perfecting of the souls of men. How frequently we altogether lose sight of the fact that God has a specific end in view in the creation and government of the world ! and when we theoretically admit the existence of intelligent design in the unfolding of the history of the race, how often we act as though we believed that that design contemplated

little beyond brilliant intellect, political grandeur, material wealth, and the gaiety of nations ! If we are co-workers with God, let us often remind ourselves of His ideal, consult His plan and programme, and strive toward His purpose, which is altogether spiritual, holy, and beautiful. To realise the kingdom of righteousness in our own breast, and to build it up amongst men, must be recognised as the supreme end of life.

In the building of a great palace or temple large numbers of masons, carpenters, plumbers, painters, and porters are occupied ; each worker carries out some fraction of the architect's mighty plan, and together they embody his ideal in tangible fulfilment. We might easily imagine that a great city is a great chaos in which each worker pursues his individual ends without any relation to the rest, without any community of interests, or the attainment of a common end. But such a conclusion would be a serious mistake. Men of science work in different spheres which to a cursory

observer appear to lie far apart with little if any relation. Mechanics, physics, chemistry, geology, biology, psychology, sociology, ethics, may seem occasionally and accidentally to have points of contact, but in the main they look totally distinct and independent. Yet it is really not so. The mechanician, the physiologist, the chemist, the geologist, the astronomer, the artist, the social economist, and the moralist are again and again startled to find how their various spheres are inter-related, how the same principles prevail throughout, how a discovery in one solves problems in another, and how all studies at last converge in making clear the interpretation of the universe. Indeed, the unification of knowledge is the set purpose of philosophy: the late Herbert Spencer aimed to show that in every direction there is the working of one force, that everywhere evolution follows an identical law and order, and that the more or less separated truths of science may be fused into one wide knowledge expressed in a

few definitions, or, perhaps, in a single proposition. What is evident in the world of thought is equally true in the world of action. Men toil in a thousand distinct departments, at ten thousand differing tasks, and the result seems only a mass of isolated strivings ; yet let us be sure that the unification of action is a fact also, that all kinds of social ministries are vitally related, and that one divine co-ordinating Mind directs our divided and confused activities to a definite and an inexpressibly glorious end. As all schools of sincere students conspire to establish the final philosophy which shall explain all ; so all types of noble workers — educational, commercial, industrial, political, artistic, scientific — unite in bringing in that ultimate civilisation which shall crown all.

The workers must not despise or disparage one another, nor must anyone thus treat himself or his task. Nothing shows our short-sightedness more than the habit of mutual depreciation and exclusion. In any particular

sphere of service how the workers fall into this sad fault! No two workers have work exactly alike, in some real way the individual task is unique; but we are impatient with each other, we wish to impose our style upon the rest, the science that is not ours is the "dismal science," and discouraging, detractive criticism rages in every vocation. How the various spheres of human activity fail to appreciate each other! The pure scientists cherish something like contempt for the politicians; the bookman looks down upon the bagman; professional dignities exclude tradesmen; men of action are impatient with theorisers; the utilitarian scoffs at the æsthetic; and the white-handed avoid the labourer. How blind we are! All are called of God; He hath given us our place and work as it hath pleased Him; and who may despise any of His servants or say that their appointments are vain? When in the creation of the world God operated alone, He knew nothing of great or small; He made hidden things as superb

as the star that glows on the forehead of the morning, and lavished on minute things the splendour of suns : the works of God do not permit the thought of meanness ; this or that may seem to us of little consequence, but it is really grand or it would not have been there. Now that we are "God's fellow-workers," let us remember this, and honour every social colleague however humble, and rank highly every contribution to the common weal down to the two mites of the poor, the weak, and the unskilled.

Let each, then, in his place faithfully and industriously realise the splendid conception of the Master-Builder. Kings and princes ought to find their occupation in making a better world, or what are they for ? Statesmen, magistrates, mayors, aldermen, and councillors possess power and glory that they may help the community in all intellectual and moral things ; the thought that the main duty of the city fathers is to make possible to the multitude a pure and happy life, ought to inspire and hallow every civic

functionary and all his policy. How hollow and mocking the parade and pride of civic status if this be not the soul of it! Merchants, shopkeepers, mechanics, ploughmen, craftsmen, and the countless toilers of the city should redeem their life from vulgarity and contempt by the daily vivid realisation of the thought that they are "God's fellow-workers." It is too often supposed that we serve God and our generation more really when we attempt some specifically pious or philanthropic work—teaching in the Sunday school, becoming foreign missionaries, or visiting the slums. Without in the least depreciating such service, let everyone know that in prosecuting his daily business he is "God's fellow-worker," as really and directly as apostles and missionaries are; fulfilling his secular task in the spirit of diligence, honour, and helpfulness, he is working not merely for bread and gold, but securing also truth, justice, and the welfare of the commonwealth. In and through our buying and selling, building,

husbandry, spinning and weaving, the weary toil of eyes and hands and feet, we are messengers of heaven and saviours of our times as was the Carpenter of Nazareth, if we only work out our manual calling in His spirit. "I sing for God," cried Jenny Lind, who did not always sing in cathedrals; "I pray with my fingers," said a celebrated organist; and the million toilers of the city working in the fear of God and the love of their neighbour make shrines of workshops and transform rough tools into sacred vessels of worship and blessing. It is comparatively easy for all who labour in the fields to feel that they are God's auxiliaries, intimately associated with Him in the adorning and fruition of the world; the forester, gardener, vintager, sower, and reaper are so manifestly coefficients with Him who gives the sunshine, the dew, and the rain. It is far more difficult to realise this fact in the city where there is no symbol of God's presence, no sign of His working; to recognise His presence in business,

learning, and politics. But He is equally with us when we strive to beautify society as when we garnish the landscape with living gold and perfume it with flowers. Here, then, is the grand idea that ought to inspire all: God works to save and bless His creatures, and we must follow as closely as may be His gracious lead. We must build up our own character, and the world that is to be, with the gold, silver, and precious stones of spiritual truth, godly virtue, and manifold charity and sacrifice.

2. *Remember the condition of success in the work of life.* If "God's fellow-workers," we must do our part. The immense significance of consecrated human activity is here most strikingly recognised. We sometimes say in false humility, and again in sheer levity, God can do without me, He can do without any of us. That is hardly the lesson taught here. The text signifies that our endeavours, gifts, and sacrifices are indispensable to the carrying out of the high ends of the divine government, and

that any failure in the agent thwarts or delays the supreme design. God requires *me*; and if through indolence, selfishness, or wilfulness I fail to act my part, there is a flaw, an arrestment, or a failure somewhere in the building of the city of God. "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Our infidelity, disloyalty, or sloth arrests the great Worker and His miracles of blessing. Although Cæsar was a consummate general, he did not win a battle without the private soldier; Michael Angelo was a great architect, yet without "hands" St. Peter's would never have been built; Columbus was the most capable of admirals, but without his nameless crew America had remained a myth: and it has pleased God similarly to condition Himself so that His great purposes can be fulfilled only through the faithful, loving co-operation of His privileged creatures. He made the earth without us, but the new creation of a redeemed humanity which is its flower is to be planted and watered by God's

husbandmen. This is a great mystery reverently to be laid to heart ; it is the clear teaching of the text and many similar passages of the New Testament. We are not to think of almighty bringing to fruition the vast scheme of the world's Ruler equally well with or without us ; but to remember that in His infinite condescension and love He has in some unknown measure made His eternal purpose contingent on human fidelity. We are sadly too familiar with the "strike" of the workman, and the "locking out" of his employer, paralysing great enterprise ; let us beware lest through indifference or indulgence we arrest in any degree, in either ourselves or society, the work of God.

On the other hand, we must not forget our dependence. "God's fellow-workers" cannot successfully ignore Him. If we cherish any high aim for humanity, the religious idea must be brought powerfully into civic, political, fiscal, and ecclesiastical life. We might as well

expect without showers and sunshine to turn a wilderness into a garden as expect to renew society without the inspirations and restraints of a pure religious faith. We bless men only as we honour God. Ecclesiastics think proudly of their splendid organisations and methods, of gifted agents and exquisite instruments ; yet all are vain unless approved by the Spirit of God and converted by Him into a flame of fire. Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase. Every soldier of the empire was important, but what were they all without Cæsar ? Every mason in Italy was important, but what were they all without Michael Angelo ? Every sailor on the ship was important, but what were they all without Columbus ? Very wonderful is the master-mind ! It turns rabbles into armies, and vain strivings into blazing triumphs. Ten thousand mediocrities do not make a master ; a master magnetises ten thousand mediocrities into masters. A master-mind is essential, and Christ is the Master-Mind

of Christendom ; the eternal truth and righteousness, power and grace are revealed in Him, and we are efficient for all high purposes as we are one with Him. “Severed from Me, ye can do nothing.” Without Him ecclesiastics, law-makers, schoolmasters, scholars, philanthropists, and reformers are a chaotic crowd blindly and feebly striving after splendid ideals which perpetually elude them. Severed from Him, individuals, institutions, and nations wither. Do we not often pathetically fail because we forget the paramount Partner ?

3. Here we find the grand encouragement in all our generous aspirations and effects. “God’s fellow-workers.” Then He will bring the work through. What an efficient coadjutor ! In mechanical enterprise it is gloriously reassuring to know that we are backed up by Nature. When we see the flowing tide with us, the winds of heaven filling our sails, the stars in their courses fighting for us, we dismiss anxiety : let us once establish a partnership with the mighty laws and

forces of the universe and we know what confidence means. It is an unspeakable consolation to a commercial man to know that the Bank of England will stand by him. And when in any difficult undertaking we are upheld by the State, and can draw freely on the national Exchequer, we smile all day and sleep all night. But how perfect the peace that ought to fill our soul when we remember that God is with us in our great aspirations, and that His promise and fulness are pledged to bring us through! He is never a sleeping partner; His matchless and tireless energy prevails at every point to make His counsel stand. He who called us to perfect holiness of spirit and life will also do it. The favoured students in the old studios who were privileged to work on the same marble or canvas with a famous chief, would fear no final failure in their collaboration; the magic hand of the master would strike the initial line of beauty, correct the false, strengthen that which was weak, supply what was

lacking, and give the finishing touches which cancel every defect of the under-study, and confer the ideal grace. So, if we faithfully do our part, grace shall eliminate our errors, and bring our weak strivings to a consummation more glorious far than it has entered into our mind to conceive. And He who has called us to serve the race will in many ways, in secret and unexpected ways, come to our rescue, and make our life-work fruitful beyond all our imagination and hope.

IV.

FAITH AND POLICY.

“ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way, for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek Him, for good; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us.”—EZRA viii.
21—23 (R.V.).

EZRA resided at Babylon during the reign of Artaxerxes, with whom the learned and pious priest seems to have been a favourite. He obtained royal leave to visit Jerusalem, then lying in ruin, taking with him priests, Levites, singers, porters, and a large company, together with a considerable offering of

gold and silver, and silver vessels, contributed not only by the Babylonian Jews, but also by the king himself and his councillors. The time arrived for the departure of the exiles, and then arose the dilemma expressed in the text. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem was long and dangerous, and prudence suggested that the returning patriots should secure an adequate military guard to accompany them; but Ezra was ashamed to ask for a band of soldiers because he had boasted to the king of Jehovah's power and faithfulness. There was really nothing inconsistent between the testimony that Ezra had borne to the divine power and faithfulness, and a request for a bodyguard, yet it was possible that the request might be misconstrued, and therefore, yielding to a fine sensitiveness for the honour of God and the welfare of His cause, the noble priest resolved to transcend policy and trust everything to the unseen horses and chariots of fire.

Occasions still arise when devout men

find themselves in similar perplexity, and when they must determine whether they will trust themselves and their interests to ordinary human safeguards or rest simply on pure faith in the unseen. The dilemma is not always equally sharp and obvious, but devout men are from time to time perplexed as to how far they ought to confide in God without enlisting human aid and expedients, and how far they ought to avail themselves of those methods and instruments in which the ordinary man puts his whole trust.

1. *As a grand rule godly life must follow prudential lines.* A course of conduct recommended by sound worldly policy ought not lightly to be disregarded. We are apt to think and speak lightly of the counsels of human reason, and the natural safeguards of life, health, and property; yet sound policy is neither more nor less than a just interpretation of the principles and programme of the government of God, and is so far religious. It is most necessary that good

men should remember that very much in the laws, arrangements, and agents of human society is of divine ordination and authority. Secular and prudential as much in the ordering of public affairs may seem, at bottom such regulations are really religious; whether we think deeply enough to find the religion is another thing. We speak contemptuously of "the arm of flesh," and yet the arm of flesh may be the arm of God. The truly wise habitually recognise the validity and sacredness of the statutes, officers, and instruments which guarantee the security of men, and make possible the happiness and progress of the world. Through many generations, a vast multitudinousness of experience, and almost infinite sacrifices and sufferings, men have discovered what is safest and best in matters of health, business, and government; and to ignore rules of action approved by the discipline of ages is as if the mariner in the black night should ignore the lighthouse stars, or as if with an ominous sky he should refuse to

recognise the storm-drum and to put into the sheltering bay. In all his affairs the godly man must defer to prudence, which, properly understood, is the intellectual perception of what amid the complexity of circumstance is best to be done. Prudence does not wear a splendid and mysterious halo like piety, but she is of the same royal lineage.

God-fearing people may without inconsistency claim the protection of the magistrate and the benefit of the law. The most spiritual of men, alike in ancient and modern times, have sought the intervention of the judgment-seat, and they were abundantly justified in so doing. It is not necessary to hold that every by-law, or even that every law on the statute-book, is of divine authority ; but we may fairly recognise in our national jurisprudence as a whole the voice of God, the authority of Sinai, and with peculiar propriety just men may claim its protection whenever their rights are seriously in question. “ The

powers that be are ordained of God," and His children are well within the proprieties when they invoke the interference of the magistrate and police. "The strong arm of the law" may seem a very carnal limb, and yet be God's right arm for all that. Again, in business life the godly man betrays no unbelief when he takes into account all those prudential considerations approved by old experience. Religious men must not presume on a guardianship unknown to other men, and in consequence neglect worldly caution. A Marine Insurance Company at Cadiz once took the Virgin Mary into formal partnership, covenanting to set aside her portion of profits for the enrichment of her shrine in that city, not doubting that she would protect every vessel in which she had such a manifest interest; the infatuated company underwrote ships of all sorts at reduced rates, and forthwith came to grief. The same snare entices spiritually-minded men to-day; dispensing with ordinary circumspection,

they attempt to conduct their business on what they consider a religious basis, when they ought to know that the most religious basis is the sound commercial basis. Good souls regard it as something like a denial of the faith to insure against accident, fire, or burglars, or to make provision against sickness and age. To be ringed round by various policies appears to them as the expression of a subtle, serious scepticism. Yet the life of our Lord furnishes us with precious light on this **ve**ry question, showing the legitimacy and even the obligation of remaining true to common sense until some extraordinary moment calls for an act of faith, which does not contradict common sense, but transcends it. The devil "led Him to Jerusalem, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If Thou art the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, to guard Thee : and, On their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest haply Thou dash Thy foot

against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Most specious is presumption when coloured and disguised by religious motive, feeling, and language ! And yet the distance is infinite between the fanaticism which thus presumes, and the rational faith in God which is prepared to leap into the darkest gulf upon a clear indication of the divine will, but which until that indication is given plants its feet on solid ground and takes no liberties.

A Christian nation may need the "band of soldiers." There is so much in war contrary to the Christian spirit that many Christian people denounce it in any case. They will trust everything that a great, free people hold dear, to the wall of fire which surrounds the saints ; the officer in blue may guard their personal property, but the one in red must not defend the interests of the nation. A gentleman strongly averse to the military was walking in his garden with a friend, and whilst doing so

vehemently denounced the military forces, maintaining that God will preserve the righteous nation that trusts in Him. "What is that above your garden wall?" inquired the friend. "Barbed wire," responded the pacific gardener; "I have been annoyed by trespassers, but this wire keeps them out effectually, and you see I have just added a few fresh strands." The army and navy constitute the barbed wire of the national vineyard. It will be a delightful day when we can dwell in cities without walls, and it will come; but, alas! although the day is dawning it has not yet broken. It is a painful necessity that we sometimes draw the sword, and when nothing else remains we must defend ourselves without shame or fear. Liberty and humanity demand fighting forces, and, therefore, as the American philanthropist remarked, "Gunpowder sometimes smells sweet."

The saint without anomaly may avail himself of the physician's aid. The system known as "Christian Science"

which has recently attained notoriety teaches that religious men in dealing with sickness ought altogether to discard science. The sick saint is to appeal to higher laws, to invoke invisible ministers of health, to find in the action of will and imagination ethereal balms of strange virtue, and to be made whole by mysterious processes inscrutable to students of physiology. According to this view, the presence of the physician in the chamber of the good man is equivalent to a disavowal of the faith, a bit of tangible atheism, a thing as heathenish as the calling in the medicine-man of a savage tribe. We ought to be ashamed to summon medical aid seeing that we have boasted of the hand of our God being upon us for good. But this view throughout is miserably mistaken. The whole conception springs out of a lack of appreciation of the divinity that pervades all things, and betrays blindness to the glorious fact that natural laws and processes are the appointments of God and the channels of His grace, which, indeed,

they are. We must not confine the grace of God to the sacraments of the altar; all the gifts of Nature, all the specifics of science, all the ministries of knowledge and experience are sacramental also, and to be received and realised by faith with thanksgiving. There is no Christian science except as all true science is Christian, and the cultured physician, working closely on the lines which condition health, is a loyal servant of God and humanity in whom the pious sufferer has special grounds for trust. John Wesley tells that on a certain occasion he was "cured by sulphur and supplication," and all men who are wise as they are good will practise the dual treatment. To refuse medical aid and its prescriptions, trusting wholly in God, may by some be mistaken for sublime faith, but it is really practical atheism, ignoring as it does the established order of God.

The Christian Church at given junctures may claim the succour of the State. We are solemnly warned against

invoking the “secular arm,” but there is more divinity in biceps than some think. On the ground of equity the missionary may claim national intervention at least equally with the trader. The trader is not always acceptable to the native government, yet he is privileged by treaties, hedged about by threatening circumscriptions, and if he should suffer in person or property is liberally compensated; but the missionary, in the opinion of many, must enter upon his high and disinterested work entirely at his own risk. Political and military guarantees are boldly demanded in the interests of commerce, yet the very parties claiming protection for their merchandise howled at the thought that the Government should shield the missionary, his wife, and little ones. A band of soldiers must encircle with a ring of steel the chests of opium, whilst the devoted men and women who carry across the wilderness the elements of a new and higher civilisation, who bear the sacred vessels of godliness,

truth and mercy, are to be abandoned to the wrath of the heathen. Let religious men, on occasion, claim the law, the institutions, the forces of the land, in the higher interests of the race. It is no more contradictory to claim imperial protection for spiritual work than it is to instal a lightning conductor on the steeple of the church.

2. *The crisis comes when in pure faith we must venture all upon God.* “I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers.” Ezra was jealous for the cause of God, for the glory of God; and lest he should seem to impugn the divine faithfulness, or to act in a manner that might retard the restoration of Israel, he was prepared to brave serious personal peril. Let us be careful, however, that we do not represent prudence and faith as necessarily disparate and contradictory states of mind and programmes of action. After all, faith is only a higher prudence, and as such the New Testament recognises it. “By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning

things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. xi. 7). "Moved with godly fear," moved by prudential considerations, by a wise foresight. "Prudence is not named as the source, but as the reward of his conduct. By his believing obedience he came to be at last the one who was truly prudent. A truth of great practical importance! He who, like a child, blindly follows the will of God, regardless of all consequences, is the one who is truly prudent; for he builds on the eternal, and He will never allow His own to come to shame. He, on the contrary, who in the fear of man reckons when it will be profitable to follow the Lord, he who first anxiously weighs the consequences, will with his false wisdom assuredly come to shame."*

Prudence is that state of mind in which we note, consider, and estimate whatever is perceptible by the senses; faith is the faculty which discerns laws and facts not discernible by the senses;

* Ebrard.

but the two operations and their conclusions are not necessarily contradictory. Faith is a higher judiciousness, a knowledge of and confidence in an established order less understood, yet just as real and trustworthy as the material order and its sequences so familiar to the common experience. Faith is not an appeal to chance, a game of hazard, a leap in the dark ; it is a rational confidence in higher laws and forces which have been demonstrated and vindicated in the experience of the wisest and purest of mankind.

It is our solemn duty and privilege on rare occasions to trust in God without any of those adventitious aids which ordinarily are obligatory. In matters of physical health and safety we may take our soul in our hands. In the conduct of business are crises when we are justified in ventures not in accordance with approved utilitarian canons. Exceptional circumstances may render it a clear Christian duty to waive our civil rights. Whilst the Church of Christ is

entitled to State intervention equally with commercial and political pioneers, there are junctures when we most honour our Master and best serve His cause by trusting entirely to His unseen arm. And in our individual life also are occasions when, moved by high considerations, we must dispense with human instrumentality, ordinary expedients, and the various provisions of the practical judgment, trusting God to take care of us and of His name and work.

But let us be sure that we *are* moved by the highest considerations. No one can well advise us in these critical hours; it is then that we realise most vividly the sense of personal responsibility. The Spirit of God alone can be our counsellor, and no meaner thought must interfere with His illumination. Not in levity, temper, pride, selfishness, indolence, or presumption must we decline the conventional arrangements, or the natural safeguards which guarantee public and individual welfare: it must ever be with deep seriousness that we

swim off into the azure, and trust every-
thing to our wings. "Then I proclaimed
a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we
might humble ourselves before our God,
to seek of Him a straight way for us,
and for our little ones, and for all our
substance." In this spirit should we
poise ourselves in the air, and when we
do so God will not fail to honour the
momentous venture of faith. "Then
we departed from the river of Ahava . . .
to go unto Jerusalem; and the hand of
our God was upon us, and He delivered
us from the hand of the enemy and the
liar in wait by the way."

V.

STRENGTH AND SWEETNESS.

“And the king made of the almug-trees pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king’s house, harps also and psalteries for the singers.”—1 KINGS x. 12.

THE pillars and psalteries were hewn and carved out of the same tree, and so we will regard the text as a reminder of the fact that in all accomplished character inhere strength and sweetness.

I. *Strength.* “Pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king’s house.” The almug-tree, or sandalwood-tree, was close in grain, firm in fibre, sound and incorruptible, only such timber being fit for pillars. And, first of all, the people of God must be strong and established in spirit. The saints of the Old Testament were heroic, and the saints of the New Testament not a whit

less so. Critics of the blood-and-iron school affect to prefer the former, but such preference is based on entire misconception. The saints of the New Testament have put off the carnal armour of sword and shield, and no longer figure on fields of battle; yet in essential strength, endurance, and courage they are in no wise inferior to Mosaic, Davidic, or Maccabæan saints. Our Lord Himself was distinguished by sublime faith and bravery; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews places Him in the front of the procession of the heroes of the old world, and His apostles and disciples soon showed that they shared in His supreme strength and invincibility, resisting unto blood, striving against sin. In the various catalogues of the virtues which occur in the New Testament the virile, athletic, military virtues are as frankly recognised as in the most austere systems of Greece and Rome; milder moral traits, which receive no recognition in the ethical codes of the classic peoples, are acknowledged

and extolled, but the manly, severe virtues are never forgotten. This strength of conviction, sternness of principle, and constancy of purpose, this solidity and force of mind and action, formed the basis of that beauty and sweetness of character which charmed the world in the primitive Christians.

Without strength there is *no grace of life.*

Without depth and thoroughness character does not attain sweetness. We scoff at beauty as being "skin deep," but this is a consolation of philosophy in which the consolation is much in excess of the philosophy, for beauty springs from the roots and foundations of things. The loveliness of the earth is the expression of forces operating below the surface; the bloom of the human face is the result of the health of organs concealed in the depths of the body; and loveliness and sweetness of character spring from the soul—spring from a soul pure and strong. They "outwardly appear beautiful," was our

Lord's description of the sepulchres and saints of His day; and such a description forcibly indicates the extreme unsatisfactoriness of shallow beauty. A great painter of antiquity remarked of the picture of his rival, "Not being able to make it beautiful, he has made it rich." By a lavish use of colour he had sought to atone for the vision and magic of genius. This was the trick of the Pharisee. What was lacking in depth and reality he attempted to disguise by superficial decoration; and in all generations there have been moralists who have sought, by shallow ceremony and etiquette, to hide the lack of essence and inspiration. But such affectations of grace never long deceive; the falsetto is painfully apparent.

Without firmness and vigour, to put it in another light, character does not attain beauty and sweetness. Reality, solidity, and energy underlie all satisfying dignity of manner and winsomeness of conduct. Hidden within the leaves are stout branches, the graceful figure

is sustained by the firm skeleton, the foundation of the greensward is in the granite, and the basis of flowers is often iron and flint; so genuine charm of character is founded in serious views, strong conscientiousness, unbending integrity, and uncompromising purity of mind and heart. There is no short and easy way to grace of life; its secret goes a long way back, even to the health of the soul. Pleasant people often fail to satisfy us; on the contrary, they disappoint, and even irritate us. The truth is, they give the impression of superficiality and feebleness. Their amiability is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of impotence; they are gracious without grit, too apologetic, they lack earnestness and conscientiousness, they shirk duty which involves unpleasantness and sacrifice, and we come at length to feel that their affability is a mere sentiment, an artifice, a prettiness of behaviour rather than an expression of sterling grace. Depth, thoroughness, and vitality are absent, and without them felicities

of speech, style, and manner are the reflecting colours of the chameleon which perish whilst they shine. Principle, affirmation, and positiveness, together with a prevailing sense of duty and capacity for struggle and sacrifice, are essential to sustained attractiveness of character. Sweetness soon cloys if it is not honey out of a lion. The delicacy of the rose offends if not grounded on the rock. The sparkle that delights is the sparkle of the diamond. Frost-work on a bride-cake is one thing, lily-work on a pillar is another.

Seeking to make life sweet we must first make the heart sound, for out of radical truth and organic purity blossom real courtesy, gentleness, and the manifold graces of life. “Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely.” The lovely is the flower of the pure. Do not paint the face, cleanse the heart; do not coax your dress, get a better figure; do not revise your etiquette, be transformed in the spirit of your mind. Profundity, robustness, freedom, and

harmony are at the root of fine character. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," and in the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, do we find the secret of satisfying and abiding sweetness.

As there is no real grace of life without strength, so there is no *efficient service* without it. "He made pillars for the house of the Lord." To become efficient for high and holy service in God's Church we must possess positive qualities, elements of strength and stability, independence of thought, sincerity and assurance, uprightness and steadfastness, power of patience and sacrifice. Fussy men in all the denominations seem to be pillars, but, in fact, are poor creatures counting for little. The secret of efficiency is reality. Without sincerity, strength, and strenuousness, service is shallow and sterile. It is no easy thing to be a veritable power and blessing in a religious community. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple

of My God, and he shall go no more out." Only he who in his own personality overcometh the temptations of sense, the vanities of the world, and the wiles of the devil, is fit to serve in the kingdom of God, and only his service avails.

"And he made pillars for the king's house." If we would render real and permanent service to the State, we must possess the strong, fine qualities of the Christian character. Men utterly destitute of sincere conviction and moral principle fancy that nothing more is needed to become a pillar of State than to secure a majority at the poll; but we do the commonwealth little good except as we take into it the spirit of godliness, the genius of righteousness, the power of self-sacrifice. We cannot make a pillar of bamboo; there must be something in it of heart of oak, solidity of marble, texture of iron and bronze. He who would become a pillar in Church or State must first *be* a pillar in deed and truth. He who covets to become a real

blessing to society must first attain knowledge, a true heart, conviction, and character built on the rock. The most important column in this world is the vertebral column; it took ages to fashion it, and nothing good, great, or lasting is possible without it. A backboneless acrobat is a treasure in a circus, but little use or ornament elsewhere. Wisdom, principle, resolution, and persistence are the articulations of an effective spine, the indispensable qualifications of true workers for God and humanity.

II. *Sweetness*. "Harps also and psalteries for singers." The wood that furnished the pillars shed perfume and made music. The New Testament, which enjoins the manly and martial virtues as imperatively as Stoicism did, enjoins also "whatsoever things are lovely"; it is not, as some theological interpretations would lead us to suspect, a sort of jungle planted with razor-grass, stinging nettles, cacti, and briar, with an araucaria for its tree of life; it is much rather an enchanted garden, whose flowers are

the delight of the eyes, velvet to the touch, and whose fragrance, to use Bacon's words, comes and goes like the warblings of music. We are all conscious of the singular beauty of our Lord—nothing of Him was loud, harsh, or hard; and it is the privilege of His disciples to remind us of His patience, forbearance, and courtliness. Now it is often alleged that it is exactly here that many Christians are seriously at fault; they are found to be rough, rude, and intolerable, painfully lacking sweetness and light; not sandalwood at all, but knotted, gnarled, and excruciating.

First of all, let us enter a sincere apology for some of the saints who are flouted by cultured people. The very men who excite the anger of the fastidious, if better known, known as they really are, known as God knows them, would be confessed true gentlemen: the coarseness is in the bark, the satinwood within. None need wonder at their unpolished exterior, it is sufficiently

explained by their origin, calling, and associations, by their lack of education and opportunity; but once know them intimately, and their spirit, tastes, and manners prove wonderfully delicate. Mr. St. John, the naturalist, relates that when exploring the recesses of the Highlands he frequently came into contact with the natives who were living in the rude Highland way, and at first he thought them morose, unobservant, and stupid; but as he continued to live amongst them the truth appeared: they appreciated their majestic hills and lakes as keenly as their visitor did; in their soul was the love of beauty and in their lips the law of kindness — they were thinkers, poets, saints. In a book recently published, entitled "The Woman who Toils," by Mrs. John Van Vorst, in which a pathetic picture of the coarse and painful condition of life of some American factory girls is given, the authoress repeatedly notes the peculiar gentleness and refinement of the most abject workers. Christians who ruffle the polite,

and who are the butt of æstheticism, are often the gentlest of men and the loveliest of women. Forbidding they may be to the hasty glance and superficial judgment of the smart set, but it is the exterior only that is unpolished : which, after all, is infinitely better than moral rottenness hidden by the art and mystery of social gilding. Harriet Martineau, writing about the disappointing revelation in Lockhart's "Life of the true Walter Scott," ends with this just reflection : "If great men fall below our expectation, let it be remembered that there is another point of view from which the matter should be looked at—that we gain thus a new sense of the glory and beauty of virtue and incorruptibleness in the humble matter of everyday life." Unscrupulous exhibitors send to the flower-show blooms which quite eclipse their modest neighbours; but when the prizes are adjudged, the pretentious flowers are rejected because it is discovered that their leaves and petals have been cunningly doctored :

so the great Day will doom many a manufactured article, and confer the final reward upon flowers of the field whose whole charm is their truth and sweetness.

Let it, however, be frankly acknowledged that Christian people are sometimes uncommonly unlovely, as unlovely as they are made, nay, as unlovely as they make themselves, being artists in ugliness. They are sour, narrow, boorish, and exasperating, priding themselves on their unpleasantness. The type is far too common, and gives sad occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. How is this disagreeable fact to be explained? Too many pious people cherish a false and unscriptural ideal; they recognise conscience as the chief element of character, and think that graciousness can be cultivated only at the expense of conscience. Therefore they magnify conscience at every turn, denying the claims of grace, and blurring in themselves whatever beauty of holiness may tend to reveal itself. A perverse conception of

the Puritan character and habit does us immense harm—deforming sanctuaries, impoverishing worship, and blighting character. We all know uncouth brethren who have sufficient uprightness to supply with pillars the temples of Karnac, or the halls of the Alhambra, but whose grim constitution would not furnish grace enough to suggest a fiddlestick. No incompatibility exists between graciousness and principle. Properly understood, conscience is at once the basis of character and the secret of beauty. According to Jean Tisseur's epigram, "Man is an ornamented conscience." The ideal Christian man is—a conscience adorned by, and adorning, the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Sombreness and unmannerliness do the conscience no service ; they give it a false bias, and often survive its extinction. One who is born from above ought not to be guilty of bad breeding. We believe in the uprightness and downrightness of the pillar; let us admire also the curve of the harp, and its sensitive strings : we

magnify the spinal column, yet let us not forget how that main pillar in the house of life is veiled and garnished by manifold graces and flexibilities.

Let the sweetness of Christian character find expression in the house. One of the most pleasing aspects of modern times is the presence of art in lowly homes, giving the touch of grace to every humblest, household, necessary thing ; delightful manifestations of skill and ornament appearing in the wood, lead, iron, and common crockery of the cottage. But if art thus makes the house into the house beautiful, what will not gentleness, considerateness, and politeness do for the household ? "The aim of art is to express the sublime in the trivial," said J. F. Millet ; if in the home we reveal our sublime faith and righteousness in doing gracefully many little things, the home will be far brighter than it sometimes is. Conscience expressed in corrosives and godliness in gaucherie are not the happiest demonstrations of the Christian spirit. A house in which

there is nothing but reason, conscience, and duty is one of the most forbidding places of a trying world. Having reared our pillars and buttresses, let us carve out a psaltery and make life pleasant for all that are in the house.

Sweetness is equally called for in the business sphere. Christians fairly gracious elsewhere put the softer qualities aside when they enter upon business scenes and relationships, as if only a certain severity of temper suited that department. They do violence to their finer instincts out of a mistaken notion that grace is misplaced in business. Although in heart sincerely kind and generous, they feel obliged to keep on hand a ready fund of harsh words and ominous gestures for the offensive and defensive tactics of business, just as some of the magnificent orchids of Guiana are garrisoned by a swarm of ants, hairy-spiders, cockroaches, and centipedes which on occasion troop forth from the depths of the flower. It is a mistake. Nowhere is gentleness

more effective than in the shop, the warehouse, and the market-place. Silk has a fibre more tenacious than that of steel, and the graciousness of a strong man secures him most commanding influence. Fine behaviour and considerate speech in masters and men are infinitely more effective for all purposes of advantage and peace than explosions of vulgar wrath on the one side or a hostile habit on the other. Whilst you are sure of the hard, firm columns, without which successful business is impossible—precision, punctuality, diligence, economy, and subordination—bring in also the psaltery, and show that the poetry and music of humanity have a place even there, and that they can convert stern duty into delight, and make the inexorable conditions of life a discipline of what in our nature is noblest and best.

In our intercourse with all men let us covet and cultivate this grace of spirit and life. A sceptical writer was arguing the other day in one of the magazines

that the old evidences for Christianity were discredited, and that now its hold upon the world was entirely owing to “the beauty of the character of Jesus Christ.” We need not for a moment concede that the old evidences on which Christianity relied are abandoned, and yet we may welcome the homage which is thus paid to the transcending loveliness of our Lord. There is a strange, world-captivating, world-subduing power in the glory and sweetness of the mystic Rose. Ought we not to give beauty a fuller recognition in our ideal? Ought we not more ardently to seek in deeper truth and purity of heart that mingled might and mellowness, majesty and mildness, greatness and grace which invest our Lord with invincible and perennial fascination?

“Strong Son of God, immortal Love,”
make us partakers of Thy strength and tenderness, of that glory which Thou hadst with the Father before the world was!

VI.

THE CANON OF CONDUCT.

“For this is right.”—EPH. vi. 1.

I. *The Standard of Christianity.*

“Right” is a law of conduct not based on accident or convenience ; it arises out of the depths of eternity, and is comprehended in the depths of our nature. A secularist writes thus : “Where numbers of men are gathered together, they have the right to agree among themselves as to what things may or may not be done —in other words, to erect a standard of morality adapted to their needs” (Nisbet). This is not the view of the text. It assumes an absolute and eternal law, obligatory on all men, everywhere ; it goes back to the divine, the infinite, the immutable. We cannot fix the time of day by agreeing among ourselves ; the clock declares the hour, and the sun regulates the clock. The sun is the

standard of time, and it would be folly indeed to attempt to ignore the sun, and fix the hours by caprice. We cannot fix the measure of a thing by agreeing amongst ourselves. The yard measure declares the length and breadth of a thing, and the astronomer determines the standard yard by the motion of a star. The star supplies the standard of measurement, and it were folly arbitrarily to attempt to regulate the yard stick. We cannot determine the scale of colour by agreeing amongst ourselves ; the rainbow is the standard of colour. We can never ignore or override the great facts of Nature ; they were before us, they persist in spite of us, and our safety and happiness are secured by strictly observing and obeying these facts. So the rules which regulate personal conduct and social duty cannot be prescribed by an agreement among ourselves ; the canon of conduct is decreed by the facts and laws of the eternal universe of which we are citizens. Duty is sublime, founded on eternal relationships ; conscience is the index of the divine and

supernatural ; right differs essentially from might ; justice and convenience are terms wide asunder by the breadth of the heavens ; righteousness is the law of the unchanging universe, the will of Him in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

If, then, the rule of right is the declared will of God, where must we look for that declaration ?

Partially it is expressed in *Nature*. “Obey your parents, for this is right” ; i.e. it is enjoined by instinct and natural law. Certain great rules of conduct are inferred from the constitution of things, and suggested by the mind itself. A more perfect knowledge of ourselves and of the world tends to make clearer the path of life and duty. Here is the higher ministry of science. The revelation of the divine will is further disclosed in *the law of Sinai*. “Which is the first commandment with promise.” Those who are best acquainted with nature are most entirely convinced of the ambiguity of its moral teachings. A century ago influential thinkers taught that nature was

abundantly sufficient to guide mankind into all truth, and that any other revelation was superfluous. That point of view has, however, now been abandoned. Distinguished naturalists are satisfied that if we would reach the higher principles of action we must ignore nature, whose operations disclose the most serious injustice, selfishness, and cruelty; and students who do not share this extreme opinion are free to acknowledge that the sun gives only a dim religious light, and that the moral teachings of physical things and animal life are most obscure and perplexing. How precious, then, are the voices of Sinai! The Old Testament is one grand instruction in the higher law. All who honestly seek the light of life, the path of sovereign duty, the way everlasting, must be prayerful students of the oracles of God which are the classics of the conscience. The rule of conduct finds complete expression in *Jesus Christ*. “In the Lord” (vv. 1, 4, 5, 6). In Him the knowledge of the supreme will is fully and finally declared. What is truth? What is right? What

is duty? As the sun is the standard of time, as the star is the standard of measure, as the rainbow is the standard of colour, so is our Lord the standard of conduct. What would Jesus do? Yes, that is the question; and it is best answered not by flippantly imputing to our Lord our own fancies and prejudices, or by off-hand appeals to some incident in His career, but rather by those who sympathetically study the Gospels, who are often with the Lord, and who by daily fellowship enter into His Spirit.

The application of the rule of right to individual acts and special situations requires the utmost carefulness. "*This is right.*" Men too often proceed to give their verdict on the right or wrong of a thing about which they are most imperfectly informed. They have large, vague, general conceptions of truth, justice, and purity; but how to bring these conceptions to bear on the questions of everyday life requires knowledge and patience, and here they are egregiously at fault. Miss Martineau has a story of Carlyle setting

forth on horseback to seek a fresh house, with a map of the world in his pocket; after this fashion, by reference to universal ideas we consider ourselves competent to resolve our personal, local, current difficulties. Much, however, comes between the general sense of righteousness and any specific act of moral judgment. In the brain of the young artist glows the thought of beauty, yet a long apprenticeship is necessary before he can grasp and apply its principles; the young scholar leaving school is versed in arithmetic and mathematics, yet a considerable interval succeeds in which he has principally to learn how to avail himself in practical affairs of his abstract knowledge; and much thought and experience are essential before we can realise our sense of mystic holiness, and confidently discriminate in matters of conduct approving this particular action or the other as right and obligatory. "Duty, as it presents itself to us, is a very complicated matter. To do it with certainty a man must not be merely good, but

wise.”* How much is said in God’s Word about wisdom, understanding, prudence, judgment! We must take infinite pains to acquaint ourselves with facts, and to know how the rule of right applies. “Human progress means, before all things, the education of conscience.” One of life’s saddest ironies is witnessed when men with an acute sense of right, combined with a deplorable ignorance of the situation, are called upon to act. We do not take too much pains to be good, but we take far too little to be wise. We must inform and discipline the conscience on all questions of duty, as in art men educate the sense of beauty and in science the sense of truth.

Here, then, is the criterion of conduct. “For this is right.” A short canon, yet majestic in its nature, and of universal and perpetual import and obligation. With a sincere mind, seconded by diligence, determine what is the noblest act or course of conduct in any given circumstances, then adopt it at any cost or hazard. Do the

* W. E. H. Lecky.

right, only that. Do it, win or lose; do it, laugh or cry; do it, sink or swim. The equitable, just, fair, true, honest, everywhere, always.

II. *The standards of the world.* Here we get into the plural. The perfect is simple, but leaving it we have to deal with the manifold. By what tests, then, do men of the world decide their course of action?

For this is *customary*. Great is the power of tradition. One generation follows another acquiescing in all kinds of equivocal practices, in trade, politics, social life, and everything else. "This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings." Our Lord warns us emphatically against this snare. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you." And this six times over. Striving after a better world we must drop the scurf of antiquity. Time effects marvellous changes, but immemorial wrong does not change into right. Let us be truly conservative and walk uprightly, for righteousness

is older than all traditions. We have had enough of "old time": let us welcome the new time with more of the glory of God upon its face. Great is the power of opinion. Many who loudly boast of independence are the abject slaves of public opinion; they do not obey their finer sense, but the majority. In the teeth of popular sentiments and ideals let us maintain a conscience reinforced by the sense of eternity. Great is the power of fashion. The sovereign authority with many is the sensation of the hour, the spirit of the time, the idol of the multitude, and yielding to the subtle tyranny they do violence to their best convictions and impulses. Let us steadily look beyond tradition, opinion, and fashion to the things which cannot be moved, to the eternal verities, the ideal right, the word of the Lord which liveth and endureth for ever.

For this is *popular*. The honour and rewards which come from men constitute for many the law of life. In municipal life these bribes allure;

representatives do not with a single eye regard the real merit of a measure, but rather consider the influence of their vote on the next election. Politicians are suspected of a similar economy of principle; the marrow of patriotism and the essence of statesmanship being to sit on the rail discreetly, and at the right moment to drop on the side of the crowd. Let us hope this procedure is rare; we are saved by hope. The artist blights his genius and frustrates his mission by deferring to interest and applause. And the preacher degrades his high office by burning incense to the democracy. Sincere artists scornfully reject the maxim that "the end of art is to please"; adopt that point of view, they indignantly exclaim, and the wildest conclusions follow. Is, then, the end of life to please? Surely not; the end of life is truth and righteousness, and through truth and righteousness peace and joy, if you can get them; but he who covets power and praise, disregarding the higher law,

gains at best a garland of withering flowers. Stand by the right whatever unpopularity it brings ; only be sure that your singularity is that of a noble conscience and not of crankiness.

For this is *profitable*. Georges Sand bears this testimony : "I have witnessed revolutions and closely seen the actors in them ; I have fathomed the bottom of their souls—I should rather say of their bags." In public life the carpet bag is in great request, often playing a much larger part than the conscience. In commercial life the sense of interest usurps the functions of the moral sense. Business men take advantage of their neighbours' ignorance, inexperience, misfortune, or necessity. In the old days barbarous wreckers with false lights betrayed the passing ship, and then plundered it ; does not this pirate spirit survive in the modern trader who ruthlessly takes advantage of his shipwrecked brother ? Far from this ignoble spirit let us at any and every sacrifice firmly hold by the golden rule whose gold is

good: "For this is right." We must give the highest law its just place and expression in the market-place. "For what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose himself?"

For this is *pleasant*. As some at every turn apply the utilitarian test, others determine life by the epicurean. Sometimes the appeal is to the grosser appetites, and again to physical sympathies and passions. "And when the woman saw the tree was pleasant to the eyes, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." The agreeableness of things is the canon of conduct, and a fatal one. Microbes are sometimes as beautiful as they are deadly—bacteria are known which, when placed in a suitable environment, produce almost all shades of colour: so things which poison the soul more certainly than microbes destroy the body beguile by their loveliness and pleasantness. If the pleasant is also the pure, let us not be afraid of it; but if not pure, whatever its charm, leave it to rot. In whatever challenges the bodily senses, the social instincts, and the more

delicate, intellectual tastes, beware of artificial paradises, intoxications, and illusions. Diderot gave the quaint instruction to artists, “Be the disciple of the rainbow, do not be its slave.” They are to love colour, to rejoice in it, to avail themselves generously of the splendour of things; but in their rapture there must be restraint, they must not drink to intoxication of the prism, they must remember, first and always, the truth which is the essence of beauty. But is not the epigram of Diderot also an instruction for life? Be the disciple of the pleasant, do not be its slave. See the brightness of things, love the colour, music, and movement of the world of appearances, rejoice in the poetry of life, indulge generously in the sparkle of conviviality, the ornaments of taste, the primrose paths, the exuberance of imagination and emotion, of thought and enterprise, but become not the slave of the pleasurable; first and always abide “the slave of righteousness,” to use the language of the apostle, all the riches of sensation being duly

conditioned and sanctified by truth and purity. The sanity, health, and peace of the soul are the first and last considerations. It will be no consolation to know that the arrow which sealed our fate was winged with a peacock's feather.

For this is *clever*. Men notoriously devoid of conscience and consistency work their way to the front by astuteness, and this in all spheres. A back stair leads to every eminence, and adroitness, suppleness, and unscrupulousness carry unworthy competitors far and high. Victor Hugo cynically remarks in describing one of these characters : “What a source of fortune to have a reed for a spine !” Among the greatest calamities that can afflict society is the apotheosis of the clever man ; it lends a subtle sanction to grievous forms of immorality. An American author thus bewails the fact : “The man who, by elaborate deception and misrepresentation, cheats his fellows out of a fortune is held to be ‘smart’ and clever, and is welcomed by honest men and women without hesitation : while the man who

breaks into a store and steals a few dollars' worth of goods is sent to prison for a long term of years. The scoundrel whose cold-blooded calculation results in the ruin of hundreds; who is directly responsible for as much misery as a minor war would cause; who drives men to suicide, women to shame, children to privation and suffering; whose every dollar is, without figure of speech, stolen from his neighbours, passes tranquil and admired through the world, reaps all possible material benefit from his ill-gotten wealth, and receives, at all events as far as can be seen, the respect and deferential submission of society." Looking on the sad, bewildering spectacle of triumphant cleverness and duplicity, let us not fret ourselves in any wise to do evil. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." It is eternally better to be simple with God, than to know the depths of Satan.

If you desire to live in peace and pure felicity, make the text your star. It sounds hard and harsh, it does not

seem to contain a grain of poetry or note of music, yet it yields the secret of blessedness, the poetry of life, the flowers of the soul, the music of heaven. All the jewels are in the leaden casket of law. The statutes of the Lord are our songs in the house of our pilgrimage. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

If you wish to win, follow the text. Do the right, and on the last day you will be admired on all sides; do the right, for it will finally be acknowledged that the acute man was the upright one; do the right, for it will eventually make up all arrears, it will pay splendidly, you shall gain yourself; do the right, it shall prove the pleasant, even the fulness of joy and the pleasures which are for evermore.

VII.

ACCLIMATISATION IN CHARACTER.

“I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound : in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.”—PHIL. iv. 12, 13 (R.V.).

ACCORDING to Sir James Paget, “It is with minds as with living bodies. One of their chief powers is in their self-adjustment to the varying conditions in which they have to live. Generally, those species are the strongest and most abiding that can thrive in the widest range of climate and of food. And, of all the races of men, they are the mightiest and most noble who are, or by self-adjustment can become, most fit for all the new conditions of existence in which by various changes they may be placed.” Are not the strongest of men

individually those who can thrive morally in the widest range of circumstance? Are not the noblest those who, by self-adjustment, are most readily fitted to all the new conditions of life which time rarely fails to bring? The general superiority of the human race to the animals arises out of that intellectual faculty by which man deftly adapts himself to widely dissimilar and strongly contrasted surroundings; and superiority of character is at once evidenced and secured by the facility with which it accommodates itself to the fluctuating tides and dissolving scenes of life, gaining wisdom, strength, and pleasure from them all.

The vicissitudes of our life, especially when they are sudden and unexpected, are always attended by serious peril. Artificial acclimatisation in Nature is possible only when effected with great care, and even then it is often followed by disappointment. After almost infinite address and patience the international horticulturist fails to coax the tropical flower to grow with the pine, or to woo

the northern beauty to bloom with the lotus and the palm. The plant sickens for its old habitat: it cannot reconcile itself to a strange environment, and usually after a brief, sulky existence becomes extinct. Sudden and severe variations of condition and circumstance similarly prove a searching ordeal to human nature. Even in regard to such comparatively slight changes as the summer holidays imply, the *Lancet* recently indited this warning:

“Many people must have time to acclimatise before they are at their proper level of health, even though they have changed from a less to a more healthy condition, and even though they have just returned home after the healthiest of holidays. This need for acclimatisation is not commonly reckoned with, and the man or woman fresh from a holiday plunges with renewed energy and the fullest confidence *in medias res*. *He* flings himself into the occupations and anxieties of his business or profession, *she* slips into the hundred tasks of a busy domestic experience, forgetful

of the sudden transition from the complete leisure of the holiday to this turmoil of the town. Thus any baneful effect of changed environment is helped by the sudden over-exercise of mind and body recently accustomed to only the easiest and most pleasant exertions. We believe that many a disappointment, transient, perhaps, but temporarily, at any rate, often keen enough, might be averted if people so contrived their return from a holiday that a few days' interval was allowed before the real work of life was resumed. In these few days the system is, so to speak, comfortably switched on to the old lines again, and the human engine is permitted to run the better for the acquired and properly stored vigour of the holiday." And, no doubt, we constantly need in the interests of mind and body to effect the transitions of season and circumstance with caution.

But if these unsettlements which affect the health call for nice adjustment, how imperative the need for watchfulness and prayer, for tact and patience when we suffer the profounder dislodgments of

life and circumstance! To pass suddenly from affluence to poverty, or from a needy condition to competence; from robustness to invalidism, or from a sick-chamber to busy life; from a servile station to one of honour, or from high estate to dependence; from country life to the rush of the city, or from the stir of the multitude to rustic stillness and solitude,—these and a thousand other changes of life affect us deeply for better or worse. The positions into which we are thrust are strange: fresh calls, duties, and temptations put pressure upon unaccustomed fibres and nerves of mind and conscience; our sensations are new and perplexing; the inevitable surprises confuse and confound; lacking the necessary experience and discipline, our novel environment is full of peril. Familiar situations sufficiently test and strain our faith and temper, but changes of fortune which violently alter the whole complexion of things are sure to demoralise us except we possess special qualities of mind and heart. Said a tourist to a famous Swiss guide: "You have

been in all weathers, and all changes of weather." "The changes are worse than the weather," replied the guide. The alternations of circumstance and experience in human life are repeatedly more dangerous to faith and principle than the most trying settled conditions to which time and habit have reconciled us.

And this ordeal of change was never more incessant and sharp than it is to-day. In the simple times of the past things were more stereotyped and existence more sluggish than we now know them to be. The whole condition of human society has become artificial and intricate, delicately poised and precarious, and such is the eagerness with which we pursue our interests and ambitions that the whole scene in which we act is being unceasingly transformed. The instability of life is accentuated more and more, its insecurity becomes more disturbing, its movements more rapid, its variations more incalculable, its vicissitudes more crowded and dramatic. Every hour we see and

feel the ebb and flow of things, and without swift handling of the helm we may easily make shipwreck. Unless we learn the secret, and know how to be abased and how to abound, both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want, we are doomed to suffer moral shock and paralysis, as the conductors who work the cages in the lofty buildings of New York, and who shoot unrestingly from one level to another, soon suffer from shattered nerves and die of heart disease.

Yet this acclimatisation of character is happily possible, as we learn from our text. With a patience and skill that science cannot rival, with subtle and inexhaustible resources, Nature effects marvellous acclimatisations in plants and flowers, creating in regions intermediate between hot and cold climates a profuse vegetation of a tropical character which can, nevertheless, sustain almost an arctic severity. A naturalist reports from China that he has seen plants which horticulturists class as hot-house plants brave the rigours of a Shanghai

winter when the temperature at night in the depth of the season sinks to zero, or nearly so; and he has known the palm to retain its leaves although snow clung to them during winter for six weeks, and in the following summer the graceful tree resumed its wonted luxuriance, as if its stem and roots had never been touched by frost and snow. Nature has taught these plants how to bear triumphantly the extremes of heat and cold.

Grace effects much the same thing for human nature. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." By His Spirit He gives us such a detachment from circumstances, such a mastery of them, such a discrimination in their use, such forethought and discernment, suppleness and strength, patience and hopefulness, that the most diverse conditions and antagonistic events conspire to our edification. What is entirely impossible in artificial acclimatisation is effected by nature; and that which is unattainable in character through any artifice of our own becomes delightfully

actual and experimental through the grace of Christ.

In a high and sincere spirituality of life we attain perfect liberty touching the outside world, drawing wisdom and blessing from all surroundings and sensations, as the bee sips honey from flowers of all shapes and colours. "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good." We must have grace for the utmost versatility of circumstance. "That is not completely good health which cannot endure any disturbance from the usual habits of life," writes the distinguished physician before quoted; and this is certainly as true touching the health of the soul, which must stand ready to endure and profit by every vicissitude of fortune. Let us live in the spirit of submission, trust, and hope, and every aspect of the variegated lot shall work in and for us its own special perfection.

VIII.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE AND INFLUENCE.

“Son, go work to-day in the vineyard.”—
MATT. xxi. 28 (R.V.).

What the father says to both sons,
Christ says to all His people.

1. *The sphere of service.*—“The vineyard.” Do not circumscribe this. God’s vineyard is the world at large; human life in all its departments. We must be workers with God in the intellectual realm; the worlds of science, art, philosophy, and literature are to be cultivated by us. We must be workers with God in the educational sphere, the commercial, the industrial, the political, the social, and the domestic. The whole range of human life and action is the field of Christian service; the world is the vineyard of God.

Yet the Church of Christ is in a particular and primary sense the vineyard of God. Here we deal simply and

directly with the reason, conscience, and heart of men in the presence of God. Here we seek to set the man himself right, to put into him a true spirit, to excite his admiration for great ideals, to inspire him with living and glorious hopes. In the days of His flesh Christ had little, if anything, to do directly with politics, patriotism, art, commerce, or socialism. He affected all these, and affected them profoundly, but always by indirection. He addressed men as spirits before God. And this is the vocation of the Church in all ages—its supreme business is to bring men to know, love, and glorify the Holy One of Israel. The world, the whole world, is the vineyard of Christ; but His Church is a vineyard within the vineyard, and it is only as the inner chosen spot is living and fruitful that the whole inheritance flourishes. A generous florist having stocked his own garden with rare flowers made excursions into the surrounding district, planting his choice things in field and hedge-row until the landscape smiled with a new beauty. So we must continually

issue forth from the Christian centre, the Church of God, with noble ideas, sentiments, principles, and aspirations, planting the holy seed in political, commercial, educational, social, and domestic grounds, until the wilderness shall blossom as the rose. Whatever else we do, let us not neglect the special work of the Church. The salvation, cultivation, and perfecting of the soul take precedence of all other kinds of work, and we fall into serious error when this work is neglected for that which appeals more immediately to our temporal interests. He who saves souls from death works at the roots of humanity, at the roots of empire, at the roots of civilisation.

2. *Encouragements to service.*—The analogy of the vineyard suggests productiveness, increase, rich and successive fruitions. As workers for God and our fellows let us take heart. Our gifts appear so frail, our sphere so narrow, our day so brief, that it hardly seems worth while to attempt anything. And then, on the other hand, the work needing to be done is so vast that it may well

inspire dismay. We often feel ourselves unnerved by these distressing considerations, we can apparently do so little to remedy or reduce the gigantic disorders of society, that it seems wiser to do nothing. Let us then remember that in the most modest service there is a potency which goes far beyond the appearance. Secret laws that we do not suspect impart an efficiency to the humblest worker for good. Life is not circumscribed, isolated, and evanescent, but manifold, prevailing over wide areas, and enduring through generations.

(1) In all true work or influence there is an element of *infinity*. It possesses a surprising multiplicity and manifoldness. The tendency of flowers is to increase, the blades of grass in the field multiply, in the woods various seeds are being selfsown, and fresh trees spring to light. So in the world—a true word, a fine act, a gracious influence, a generous deed, bear their seed within themselves, and take root, multiply, and spread. We hear much of that wonderful doctrine of modern science—the conservation of

energy, the convertibility of forces. We are told that heat may be changed into light, light into electricity, electricity into magnetism, that one mode of motion may be converted into another mode of motion, into all modes of motion. The force is never spent, it goes on continually revealing itself in new and diverse manifestations. This doctrine of the convertibility of forces is not confined to the physical sphere, it prevails in the intellectual realm. A true thought once uttered, a noble thing once done, is always turning up in a fresh shape. One of our poets has a pretty fable illustrative of this doctrine of the convertibility of forces in the mental world, which reads something like this. A musician beholding a beautiful picture is inspired by it to create a symphony, a poet hearing the music is enthused to write an epic, whilst an architect delighted with the poem is provoked into building a glorious cathedral. One beautiful thing provokes another, inspires another, demands another. This law of the convertibility

of forces finds its last and highest illustration in noble thought and action. All gracious teachings, deeds, gifts, sacrifices, survive in endless transformations. We often grieve because we are shut up to one particular line of helpfulness, to one narrow type of philanthropic endeavour and influence : we bemoan the hard fate of meagre service to which our gifts and circumstances condemn us. Be comforted. Put your soul into whatever special form of service is open to you, and in that one form recognise the potentiality of infinite service. Get your good act done, and it will turn up in perennially fresh guise—now in the shape of a deed of love, then in the strengthening of a tempted soul to an act of purity ; here it will reveal itself in patient waiting, there glow into an inspiration of heroic sacrifice ; now it will appear as personal good, again as domestic, once more stimulating to business integrity, and anon prompting to political morality. When you have wrought a worthy thing for God and men, when you have liberated a moral

and spiritual force, do believe that although lost sight of it lives on, multiplies, and reappears in a thousand benign transformations.

(2) In all true work there is an element of *universality*. Very interesting facts are brought out by modern science touching the migrations of seeds and plants—from one centre they are transported by many agencies to distant climes, and to many climes. Do good where you stand, and rely upon it that your influence penetrates to the most remote corners of the earth. In missionary work this is easily understood. In India, China, Japan, Africa, and the isles of the sea, our thought of love and deed of sacrifice manifestly make themselves felt—we see the light of our little candle shine far in the naughty world. But when it is impossible to trace the widening circles of our influence they are just as real and pervasive. Labours, prayers, gifts, and influences which seem pathetically local, are really expansive and cosmopolitan beyond the most sanguine thought and hope. The date-trees

of the Nile, the magnolias of the Susquehanna, the rhododendrons of the Himalayas, the myrtles of Cashmere, and the aromatic forests of the Spice Islands, alike contribute to vitalise the common air that we breathe day by day. These fragrant growths are distant from each other, they bloom a long way from us, they often seem to waste their sweetness on the desert air, yet really they sweeten and enrich the atmosphere of the whole world. Poetry sings about sweetness wasted on the desert air, but the grander poetry of science teaches that no sweetness is wasted. What seems far away is yet near. The beauty which glows, the perfume which distils on the other side of the planet registers itself in the health and gladness of the multitude on this. Can this be less true of beautiful and useful lives? Surely not. Inevitable and mysterious laws guarantee that our influence shall prevail to the circumference of humanity. We often bewail the narrowness of our sphere, we sorrow because we toil in an obscure corner, because we are unknown in the next

street. It is an entire mistake. A thing well done anywhere is a blessing everywhere. Subtle laws bind together the ends of the earth. In all true service is the element of universality.

(3) In all true work there is an element of *indestructibility*. Speak words of truth and grace, be helpful, persuade men to truth and righteousness, sow the seeds of right, purity, and kindness, and your influence mocks oblivion. Truth and goodness resemble those plants that give out their fragrance the more they are bruised, that spread the more they are trampled. John S. Mill in his book on *Liberty* advances the opinion that truth may be put down by persecution. He says that history teems with instances in which this has been done. The Reformation, he alleges, was put down at least twenty times before Luther. Savonarola was put down. The Albigenses were put down. The Vaudois were put down. In Spain, Italy and Flanders the evangelical work was crushed. But all this needs thinking about. If the gospel work had to be put down twenty

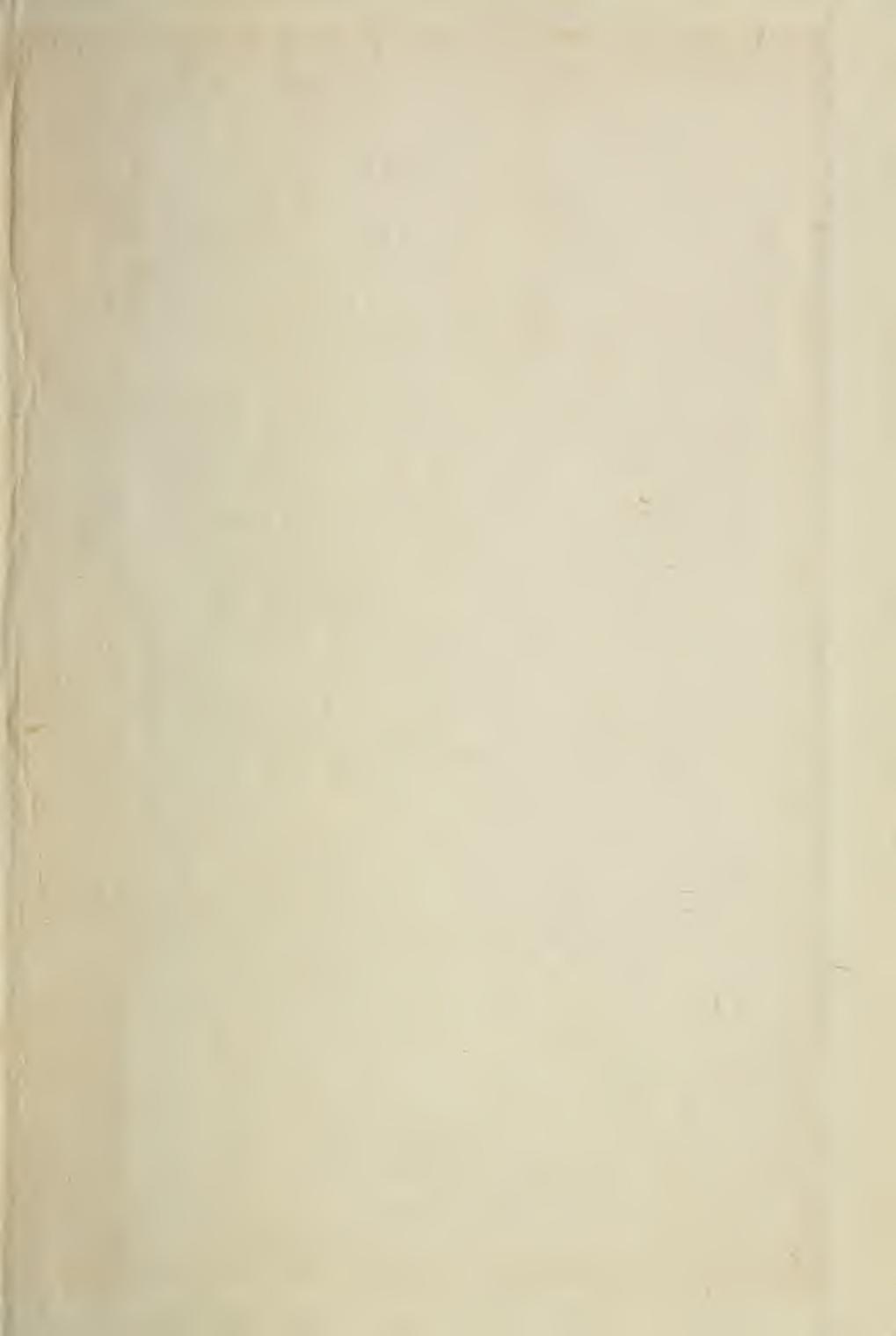
times, there must have been in it a marvellous toughness, a strange power of recovery and resurrection. An Oriental proverb asks, "Who goes to the funeral of a man that dies often?" There is certainly no need to attend the funeral of the truth, it dies too often. Who can say that the persecution that arose about Stephen put down the truth, when the scattered went everywhere preaching the word? Who can say that Wicklif was put down, when his doctrine spread to the Continent, took root in Prague, and prepared the way for Hus and Luther? Who can say that Protestantism was put down in France, when the Huguenots emigrated to the Netherlands, to England, and elsewhere, carrying with them their spiritual faith and enthusiasm? Who can say that Puritanism was put down when the Pilgrim Fathers, driven over the sea, planted on the shores of the New World the seeds of light? No; you cannot destroy the germs of truth and righteousness—their vitality is inexhaustible. The other day I was looking at a fringe of golden flowers

springing by the margin of a Yorkshire river; there are no similar flowers in the neighbourhood, and it is said that these have escaped from an old abbey, and come down with the stream mile after mile until they adorn this out-of-the-way place. So divine germs sown ages ago come down the stream of time, and spring and bloom in strange nooks and corners of the earth. Let your work be of God's right hand planting, and it will go on reproducing itself in successive harvests of light and blessing. It will not be rooted out by persecution; it cannot perish by accident; time may not breathe on its fadeless bloom.

Recently in Paris M. Becquerel was lecturing on the subject of radio-activity, and in the course of his lecture he compared the mysterious radiation of radium with the emanations of perfume. He said that, according to M. Berthelot, one milligram of musk would go on giving out scent for seven thousand years before being entirely disseminated by emanation. As regards radium, it would require exactly eleven times that period,

seventy-seven thousand years, before a milligram of radium were dispersed into the atmosphere by the phenomenon of radiation. Do not these strange facts of the material world cause us to ponder the mysteries of human influence? Can the action of mind and heart be less energetic and sustained than that of ethers? Can the radiations of souls be less penetrating than those of atoms? less pervasive? or less persistent? It is impossible to consider the intense, subtle, and inexhaustible forces of matter, and then to think lightly of the action of mind and will. If one milligram of musk gives out scent for seven thousand years, and a milligram of radium goes on radiating energy for seventy-seven millennia, where shall limits be put to the influence of a sound mind, a warm heart, a will determined to good? Human life is more wonderful than we think; human hearts are replete with sublime forces infinitely beyond those of matter; human influence will outlast musk, radium, and stars.

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